2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Death and Funeral Ceremonies

The Shilluk idea of the spiritual make-up of man is neither simple nor easy to understand. Every living man has both *wei* and *ajpo*, the former signifying "breath", "life", the latter "shadow", "image", as in water or mirror. We have already referred to the *cen* of one dying in anger and malevolence (p. 97), and there is a word *aneko*, meaning ghost, i.e. the spirit of one dead. So far we are reasonably certain of our facts, but there may be an element called *winyo* (lit. bird) of whose functions we can predicate nothing.

No death occurred in the villages we visited whilst we were among the Shilluk.

According to Hofmayr, death may be hastened when there is much suffering or if the agony is long drawn out. He states that a prolonged period of immobility of the body is taken for death; the women immediately begin to wail, the dying man is declared dead, his face is covered with a cloth, and the grave is dug.[1] Burial is at full length, a few paces from the door of the house in which the deceased lived. The grave is dug by old men, mostly relatives. A skin is placed in the grave and the body laid upon it wrapped in a white cloth (this is a recent introduction) and covered with another skin. The position of the hands is uncertain; we were told that they were laid between the knees, and also that they were placed in front of the face. Nothing is buried with the corpse, but later a hole is made near and objects placed in it.

Westermann's text, from which the following account is taken, is of special interest as it contains minute details of Shilluk behaviour; it is, however, too long for inclusion and we give only the salient features. It should be noted that his description applies to rich and important men; with a single exception the graves that we saw had no cattle horns on them, and we believe that for a poor man cattle are not always killed. The use of a bier is not invariable:—

When a man dies two fowls are killed, one being placed at the head of the deceased. An ox and a goat are also sacrificed. Beads are tied round the ankles of the men who prepare the grave:—

"The man is buried thus: Some men dig the hole, and some men skin the cow [ox in the early part of the account] . . . the hide is cut into strips, and a bier is [made] . . ., his wife is called, she is to hold the feet of the dead man, and the man is laid on the bier. His wife (or: the women belonging

[1] Op. cit., 199.

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

a man by witchcraft, to prevent rain, and to cause the cattle to be barren. — There exist two kinds of sorcerers, the one whose functions are just mentioned, who plays an important and mostly beneficient *rôle* in public life and the official religion of the community, and another one whose doings are secret and who works for mischief. If this latter is convicted of his evil doings, he may be severely fined, or even sentenced to death. — Besides these the word *jal yuŋ* "man of medicine" is sometimes used; whether this is a synonym to *ajwiŋo*, or whether it designates still a third class of "witch"-, or ordinary "doctor", I do not know.

When possessed by a spirit (or by *Jwok*?) the sorcerers become ecstatic; the same seems to be the case with a newly elected king; here it seems to be the spirit of Nyikang, which falls on his follower, vide page 149. ECSTASY

The texts contain many mythological tales and allusions, which may in former times have formed part of the strictly religious belief of the people, but exist now merely as historical traditions, without having any active meaning to the present generation; this domain of their mental life is, however, not sufficiently known as yet to allow a decisive judgment. A reminiscence of sun-service is evident from 55, page 166. The Nile and Sobat are populated by water-people, who in figure are partly like men, partly like crocodiles or fish. They had, in the *past, many intercourse with men. — According to some older writers the* spirits of the Nile are worshipped. They have their own cattle-herds, which live with them in and on the banks of the Nile. They often dive up from the water, chiefly in misty weather. When a cow is fished out of the river, it is placed under the protection of the Nile-spirits and the sun-god[1]. MYTHOLOGY

The Shilluks have two expressions which may be translated by "soul" or "spirit" of a living person: *wei* and *ajaŋ*; *wei* means "breath", and is the life-giving factor in man; the meaning of *ajaŋ* is "shadow" of a man, or "image", as seen when looking into clear, still water. — The spirit of a dead person is called *ocaŋa*; the word is derived from *caŋa* to kill; *ocaŋa* probably means "one who kills", or "who is killed". The *ocaŋa* is feared. SOUL, SPIRIT

On the abode of deceased persons the Shilluks have but vague ideas; in one of the texts the dead are called "the people of the village of God", *ji pā Juok*. Whether they have a general belief in a life after death, is not known. ABODE OF THE DECEASED

Islam does up to now not find much sympathy with the Shilluks. They prefer their own religion to that of foreigners. Only a few people who have for a longer time lived in close touch with Mohammedans, chiefly those who have served as soldiers, adopt the religion of Mohammed, or at least wear Mohammedan amulets beside their own charms. It is admirable that these people, Shilluks, Dinkas *Anywaks*, and Nuers, though having lived for centuries side ISLAM

[1] This doubtlessly relates to the cave of Nyikang, vide the preceding.

754 If a man knows that he is being bewitched he can get the witchdoctor to counteract the bad magic and save him. When he gets old the sorcerer may hire out his powers to help people.(1) It is a serious offence to accuse a man of being a sorcerer unless it can be proved, and an accuser [683] may be heavily fined. A sorcerer must be caught in the act if he is to be legitimately killed.

The Dəiyət

Dəiyət appear to be the feminine equivalents of the *jəlyət*. They are not regarded as being so evil and serious in intent as the *jəlyət*.

The Evil Eye (Yeep)

The Shilluk believe firmly in the power of the evil eye and that it is inherited, passing from a parent (male or female) to the children. It may also come suddenly upon a person. Those who possess it try to conceal the power from others.(2) Envy, jealousy or anger causes people with this power to bring illness or misfortune on others who are richer and more fortunate than themselves. The *ajwogo* can counteract the effects of the evil eye by prayer, sacrifice and countermagic.(3)

LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

844 About three months before her first child is born, a woman leaves her husband and returns to her parents' *gol* for the birth.(4) Immediately after the birth the mother is exhorted to confess all her previous love affairs to the woman acting as midwife and it is believed that were she not to do so she and the baby would die. The child is shown to the father [847] and his friends who wish to see that it is not a monorchid or deformed in any way. In the former case, the child would probably be killed, for it is believed that monorchids grow up to be sorcerers.(5) Cleansing cere- 846 monies are carried out a few days after birth. It is considered wrong to 852 have another child before the previous one has been weaned.

815 Twins are welcomed by the Shilluk. They are called *nwoɔ juok* 'children of god' and have special names. Many ceremonies occur after the birth of twins.

563 Names are given soon after birth and usually refer to some incident which has occurred in the family. The birth name is retained throughout life, although an ox-name and other names are taken later.

DEATH AND FUNERAL CEREMONIES

779 According to Seligman every living man has both a *wei* and a *tipo*. The *wei* is breath or life, the *tipo*, shadow or image. In addition, the

(1) Cyler, *S.N.R.* Vol.II, 1919, No.2, p.122. (2) *Ibid.*
(3) Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk*, 1925, p.231. (4) *Ibid.*, p.271.
(5) Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, 1932, p.70.

In addition, the

Shilluk believe in *ow* which is thought to be the malevolent element that persists after the death of one who has died with a grievance and is angry at some wrong that has been done to him.(1) They also speak of *winyo*, meaning a bird, but Seligman was unable to discover what this meant.

A dead body is buried at full length, a few paces from the door of the house in which the deceased lived. The grave is usually dug by elderly male relatives. The body is wrapped in skins, and sacrifices of oxen, goats and fowls are made after the burial, according to the family wealth. The mourners bathe in the river; no food taboos are laid on them but they shave their heads and do not wear ornaments or go to dances during the period of mourning. After a month has passed the mortuary ceremonies are held, a number of sacrifices are made and beer is brewed for the mortuary feast. According to Westermann the horns of an ox are often placed on the grave.(2)

THE ANUAK

Detailed information on the Anuak is derived almost entirely from two articles by Evans-Pritchard.

ECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS

The Anuak are, like the Shilluk, a riverain people and their villages are distributed along the banks of rivers in the Eastern Sudan and in Ethiopia. In the western regions of Anuakland the ecological conditions are somewhat different from those in the east. The western areas are true savannah, flat, almost treeless grassland, which is flooded in the wet season. In the east there is forest savannah which gradually turns into tropical rain forest. In the rainy season the western half of Anuakland is cut off from the eastern half by deep water-courses and swamps. These factors have had considerable repercussions on the political organisation of the country and largely determine the distribution of the villages and the economy.

In the savannah areas of the west, villages are built on rising ground at the edge of the flood plains and the occupants may have to move during the rainy season for fishing, fresh pastures and for drinking water. Villages built some miles back from the river (owing to flooding during the rains), also have to move. For such villages there is a wet-season village site and a dry-season village site. The regions in the west are thinly populated; small independent villages are strung out 5-20 miles apart and often with swamps and rivers in between so that in the wet season a village community may be completely cut off from the rest of the country for several months. In certain localities, as along the Gila river, villages are surrounded by dense beds of reeds and it is impossible to reach them except by the few paths available. Such villages are very difficult to attack. Where the villages of the savannah areas are not protected by these banks of reeds they are, or were in the past, protected by stockades and moats, the homesteads being closely wedged together owing to the lack of space on the mound occupied.

(1) Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, 1932, p.97.
(2) Westermann, *The Shilluk People*, 1912, p.115.

5:Lienhardt E-4 (no date) 1954 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

considered Nyikang in the form of an abstraction somewhat removed from the real person he is for the Shilluk. Even for the Shilluk there is an element of the ideal in Nyikang, who is to that extent an abstraction. Their divine being, *juok*, is a still more abstract notion and ultimately explains a wider range of diverse phenomena.

Juok is usually said to be the supreme being of the Shilluk, to be spirit, and to be 'the greatest spirit', and to be in some sense above Nyikang.[1] He is thus not inappropriately spoken of as 'God', provided that the use of this name is not allowed to introduce a more sharply defined concept of his nature than the notion of him formed by the Shilluk themselves. In many cases it would make the Shilluk texts more intelligible, and involve fewer contradictions in translation, if we were to think of *juok* not so much as the supreme being in a quasi-social hierarchy of 'beings', but as that being upon which, for the Shilluk, everything else is contingent. It is clear that if the Shilluk are asked whether God has a body or is spiritual, they answer that he is spiritual or 'like the wind', for he exists for them in no single mode, is omnipresent or multipresent, and is invisible. I do not think, however, that this separation between the material and the spiritual, by which *juok* must be placed in one or the other category, is one which would spontaneously occur to the Shilluk. They have different words for the 'spirits' of the dead. 'Spirit' generally, if it is to be distinguished from matter or body, is *wei*, which comes from the common Nilotic root meaning life or breath, and thus soul or spirit, and distinguishes what is active and alive from what is inert and lifeless. So, in translating the word *juok* as 'God', and saying that he is spirit, it is desirable not to introduce foreign conceptions of the nature of the Shilluk God as he is in himself. There is no Shilluk definition of his nature comparable to that with which those accustomed to revealed religions are familiar.

Juok, the being which created and still maintains all the world and what is in it, is one in essence, though, as it were, with many facets, which seem to refract him into a multiplicity of 'beings'. These resemble what we think of as spirits and manifestations of various sorts, and for us our use of these different words is enough to separate what they denote, conceptually, from God. For the Shilluk, who use the same word *juok* for each item in the multiplicity of forms and manifestations, and also for the principle manifest in them all, the conceptual distinction between the supreme being and other beings associated but not identical with him is not verbally made.

Hofmayr records a complex metaphysical statement made about *juok* by a Shilluk, who explained that *juok*, God, 'is from one side spirit (*wei*), and from the other side spirit, but from front and back he is body (*del*)'.[2] By this we can only understand that the human experience of *juok* may be an experience of something which takes material forms, but that these have

[1] The fullest account of the meaning of the word *juok* is in Hofmayr, op. cit., and most of what follows comes from that source unless otherwise indicated.

[2] Op. cit., p. 203.